

Rich people who are lazy and selfish are going to burn!

If you missed that point in the readings, I don't know how, but that's the gist of the first, second, psalm, and Gospel.

It's tempting to end the sermon here. I mean so often there are layers upon layers of meaning to the stories we hear, but this one cuts right to the point! Except that it doesn't.

It's incredibly easy to use these readings to condemn people who have money. Except who gets to decide who is rich? A poll of American's state by state asked, in 2018, how much money do you have to make annually to be considered rich? The answers ranged from 500,000 to 10 Million. Even in our own community, we "know" who is "rich" and most of the "rich" folks wouldn't say they fall in that column.

But being RICH or wealthy is not what these readings are about. Because you can be rich in many different ways. Yes, these readings seem to focus on money, but you can be rich in connections, rich in empathy, rich in skills. The lesson still applies!

What we do with the bounty we have is the whole point. Each of us has the ability to make the lives of those around us richer by sharing some of the wealth we have. That's the call we hear in these readings.

Having money or other things IS NOT A SIN! BUT, what we do with what we have is a direct reflection of our faith and our love for the people of God who live in this world created by God.

We bring nothing into this world and take nothing out. The Epistle is clear. Therefore everything we have in this world is from the one who created all things. We should note that nowhere in the creation story does it say "And God created money, and said it was good." Because GOD DIDN'T. Humans created money and just as gold in and of itself isn't bad, making it into a calf to worship most certainly is.

We didn't need a stock market or global finance for us to learn this lesson since it is included in readings two millennia old! But what we do need to realize is that all of us are subject to this.

Whether it was money, or food, or shelter, the rich man had all of those things and Lazarus lay outside his gate day after day. He had the ability to relieve some of Lazarus' misery and didn't. Before we go too far in condemning him, perhaps he was conditioned not to see Lazarus. While it doesn't forgive the action, it might explain it.

A friend of mine was head of Canadian Lutheran World Relief. He told of his first trip to India and how, when leaving the airport, the sea of beggars was overwhelming. His second trip, he prepared himself for it and it was easier. His third trip he said he walked right through them as though they weren't there. It was on that trip that he cried the hardest because he realized he had lost sight not of the beggars, but of the humans in need.

How often have we done that? I go by homeless folks in cities and don't notice. That's not good! It can be overwhelming at times, but if I don't see these folks as the children of God that they are I am being the same as the rich man in the parable.

The words of the Lord's Prayer say "Give us this day OUR daily bread." We don't add "Which you conveniently distribute to all people so that I don't have to be your hands in this world..." Because the distribution of the bounty is our action. There's enough in the world for everyone. We need to learn what enough means and not horde things.

We have built a society in which "enough" is relative. But contentment is the key to that. Being content with what we have then recognizing and sharing our excess is part of living a godly life. When some folks love to preach an idea that if you love GOD enough GOD will reward you with money and things, we have to fight back.

None of those ideas are in the Gospel. In fact, Jesus clearly states, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, rather treasure in heaven." We store those heavenly treasures through what we do with our earthly ones. But even there, it's not a quid pro quo. We don't get a better heaven if we work harder here.

That's the amazing thing about the loving grace of Jesus. Whether we learn the lesson early in life or late, the amount of loving our neighbor is not our ticket to life in God's house. That was secured for us through Jesus' death and resurrection. An atonement for sin that is for all, at any time, regardless of our actions. Of course, that could be twisted to say that we can just skid into redemption on two wheels after a life of selfishness. But in doing that, we miss out on the greatest joy we can have in this world, seeing the light of Christ in the lives of others when we take a moment to show them love and care that no one else wants to. Because, if we think about it, we are the worn, tired, and dirty Lazarus laying outside the gates of heaven. And happily for us, that house is occupied by someone who sees us at the gate, picks us up, and cares for our wounded souls each day. And for that may we be ever grateful.